

I. DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY OF RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK

LOCATION AND ACCESS

Raven Rock State Park is located in Harnett County. Lillington, the county seat, is nine miles east of the park, and Sanford is 20 miles west (Figure I-1). From US 1, take US 421 east. Turn left onto Raven Rock Road, and follow it for three miles to the park.

From I-40, take I-95 south to US 421. Travel northwest on US 421. After passing through Lillington, turn right onto Raven Rock Road, and follow it for three miles to the park entrance.

The Cape Fear River dissects the park into northern and southern sections. Most of the visitor facilities, including the park office, are located in the southern section. The northern section of the park is accessed from River Road (State Road 1418).



Figure I-1. Raven Rock Location Map

LAND BASE

Raven Rock State Park consists of 4,667 acres of land on both sides of the Cape Fear River along the fall zone between the Piedmont and Coastal Plain provinces of North Carolina. The Cape Fear River is one of North Carolina's largest rivers. The area is characterized by rolling terrain, extensive woodlands, unique plant life, beautiful wildflowers, several streams, and huge exposed rocks. Raven Rock itself is one of a series of striking bluffs that rise approximately 100 feet above the Cape Fear River. These bluffs extend for more than a mile along the south side of the river. The park contains several ridges that are divided by creeks that flow into the Cape Fear River. Found in the park along the river and creeks are floodplains populated by river birch, beech and sycamore.

VISITOR FACILITIES

Visitor facilities at Raven Rock State Park provide opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, primitive camping, picnicking, fishing, and canoeing (Figure I-2). Fifteen miles of hiking trails are located in the park. Equestrians can access seven miles of bridle trails on the north side of the park.

A portion of the 56-mile Cape Fear Canoe Trail runs through the park, including the rapids of Lanier

Falls and the Fish Traps. The trail travels along the Cape Fear River starting from an access point at the US 1 bridge over the Deep River. A buoy signals the location of a canoe rest stop and six campsites that offer accommodations for canoeists. Located beside the river in a low-lying area, these sites include fire rings and a vault toilet. The canoe camping area is 1.7 miles from the park office and is not accessible by car. Canoeists should reserve sites by calling the park office before embarking on a trip. Canoeists should exercise caution and wear life vests at all times. Spring floods make the river dangerous for canoeing. Portage dams and dangerous rapids.

To reach the primitive campground, follow Campbell Creek Loop Trail approximately 2.5 miles from the parking area. Five sites, each accommodating up to four people, contain tent pads, fire rings and a vault toilet.

Little Creek Loop Trail leads to the group wilderness camp, located 2.2 miles from the parking area. Located along the Cape Fear River, the five-campsite area offers fire rings and vault toilets and accommodates up to 20 people per campsite. Use of this area is by reservation only.

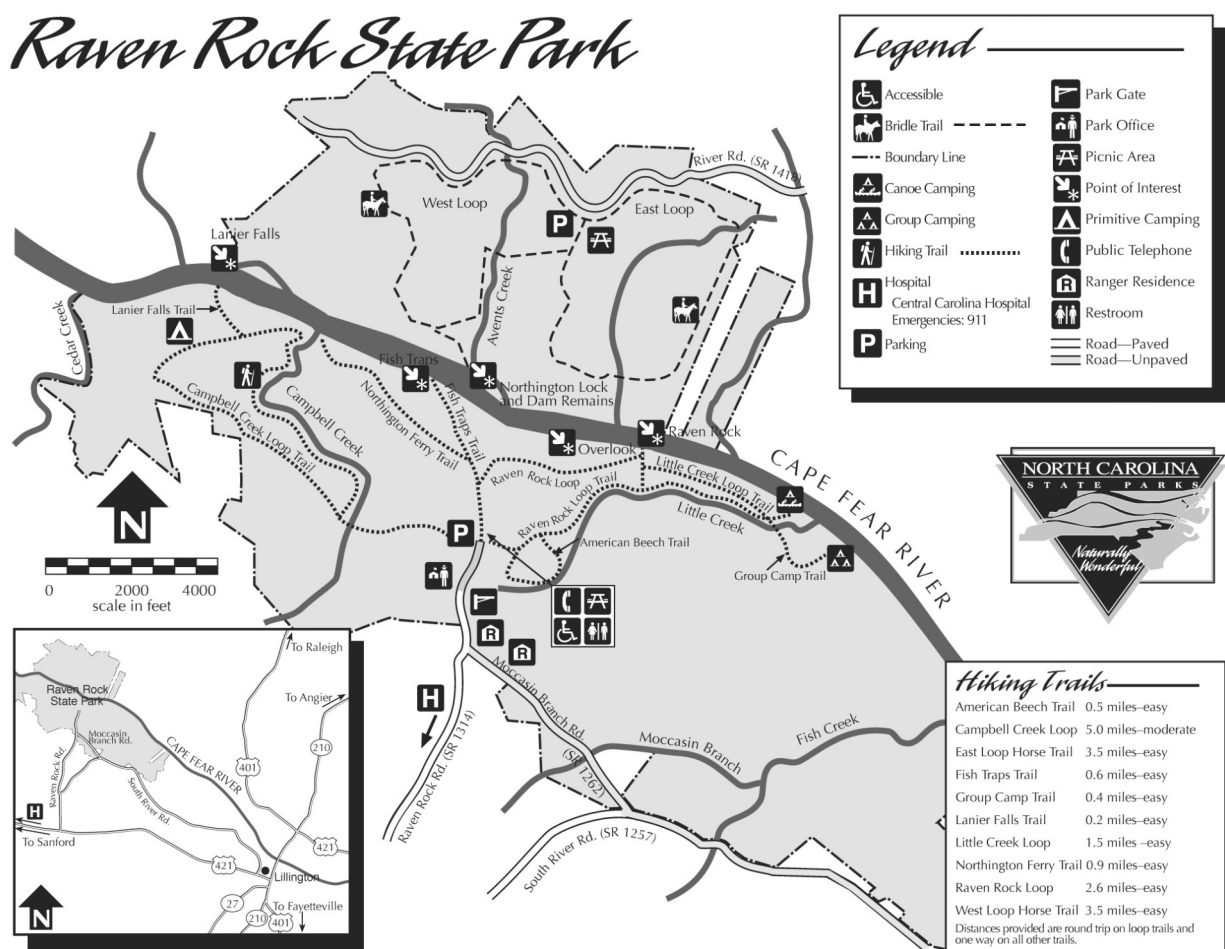


Figure I-2. Park Map with Facilities

A wide trail leads from the parking lots on the south side of the river to the picnic area. Towering oak and hickory trees provide shade for 27 tables and eight grills. Drinking water, restrooms and drink and snack machines are located nearby. Some picnic facilities are accessible for persons with disabilities, as is the restroom facility. Open play fields are adjacent to the picnic area. Although planned, no group picnic shelters are yet available. A smaller picnic area is located on the north side of the park.



Figure I- 3. Vista from Raven Rock Overlook

The best places for fishing in the Cape Fear River are the Fish Traps and the mouth of Campbell Creek. Game fish in these waters include largemouth bass, warmouth, bluegill, catfish, redear and green sunfish. Other interesting species are longnose gar, American eel, chub, shiners, darters and pirate perch. Fishing is permitted during posted park hours only. Anglers must have a state fishing license, and regulations of the NC Wildlife Resources Commission are enforced.

Many visitors are attracted to the park by the scenery including the vistas along the Cape Fear River, Raven Rock itself, and the

abundant wildflower display each spring. Many people are also drawn to the park to study the park's unique geology, plants, and animals.

HISTORY OF THE PARK

Raven Rock State Park sits along the fall zone, an area where the hard, resistant rocks of the foothills give way to the softer rocks and sediments of the coastal plain. The underlying rocks of the area were formed more than 400 million years ago by intense heat and pressure. Through the ages, flowing waters and swirling winds gradually eroded the land, carving and sculpting Raven Rock. This immense crystalline structure rises to 150 feet and stretches for more than a mile along the Cape Fear River.

The Siouan and Tuscarora Indians hunted the area until European settlers arrived in the mid-1700s. The first settlers were primarily hunters and trappers who were searching for high country similar to their native country, Scotland. Later, stores, mills and quarries were built. Many of the woodlands were farmed, and as the forests returned, much of the land was harvested for timber.

Raven Rock was originally named Patterson's Rock in the 1740's after Gilbert Patterson, who found refuge under the rock after a boating accident. For more than a century thereafter, the area was known as Patterson's Rock. It was not until 1854, when the Cape Fear and Deep River Navigation Company began building locks and dams on the Deep River, that Patterson's Rock became known as Raven Rock. The name change occurred because ravens could be seen roosting on the rock ledges.

Over the years, several roads and trails were cut through the site, and access to Raven Rock was

provided. Roads were built first to access fields along the Cape Fear River floodplain, and later on, Northington Road accessed the river crossing. Remnants of several old home sites and family cemeteries of little historic value are located on park property. The Northington family lived in the area from 1777 to 1838, owning at one time approximately 6,000 acres. They built homes, stores, roads and mills, including the Northington Mill.

Prior to the Civil War, Raven Rock was a noted landmark for the pilots of the river steamers running from Fayetteville to Haywood. This form of river transportation ended in 1859 when a hurricane



Figure I- 4. Raven Rock

struck the Cape Fear River basin and swept away nearly every lock and dam on the river. The Northington lock and dam, which was located near the center of the park, was also destroyed. Before they could be repaired, the Civil War erupted, and resources were diverted to the war effort. After the war, local residents were too poor to repair the lock and dam. With the building of railroads, river transportation became outdated and the repairs never occurred. The remnants of the Northington lock and dam can still be seen in the park.

Although steamboats no longer navigated the Cape Fear River, people returned to the Raven Rock area after the Civil War for picnics and recreation. The Northington Ferry continued to be an important river crossing for land transportation between Raleigh and Fayetteville, serving travelers until the 1920s when the Lillington Bridge was constructed. Many visitors to the Raven Rock area were probably travelers between these two cities.

When automobiles became prevalent and the Lillington Bridge was built, Raven Rock was largely forgotten. With the closing of the Northington Ferry, the site became isolated from any major transportation routes. Thus, only local residents used the area for picnicking, fishing, and hiking. Raven Rock was not brought to public attention again until 1965, when interested citizens recommended the establishment of a state park at the site (N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, 1977). At this time, the land was primarily forested and used for timbering, with some agricultural use.

In 1967 the General Assembly authorized a study commission for state parks, the first such study commission. The State Parks and State Forests Study Commission's 1969 report, *North Carolina State Parks for the Future*, recommended the addition of 15 or more areas to the State Parks System. The report also identified the Harnett, Lee, Cumberland and Hoke County region as the state area most in need of a state park (The State Parks and State Forests Study Commission, 1969).

Simultaneously, local support for the acquisition of Raven Rock was being organized. After hearing about the possibility of land being sold to either a mining or paper company, local supporters led by Dr. Robert Soots, a Campbell College professor, recommended to the Harnett County Board of Commissioners that the area be preserved as a state park. The Board of Commissioners supported the proposal and requested that it be presented to the N.C. Board of Conservation and Development.

On October 28, 1968, Dr. Soots presented the Raven Rock state park proposal to the Board of Conservation and Development's Parks and Tourism Committee where it was favorably received. The Committee directed the Superintendent of State Parks to complete an investigation and feasibility study (Minutes, 1968). The subsequent investigation found that the Raven Rock area met established state park criteria. Impressed by the area's natural resources and recreation and environmental education potential, and noting that that the park would be located in an area of the state identified by the State Parks and State Forests Study Commission as the number one priority for the addition of a new state park, the Board of Conservation and Development adopted a resolution recommending acquisition of the Raven Rock area for a new state park (Resolution, 1969).

On April 18, 1969, Senator William W. Staton introduced a bill in the State Senate to establish some 3,000 acres at Raven Rock as a state park. Shortly thereafter, on July 16, 1969, the Raven Rock Preservation and Park Committee incorporated as a non-profit organization to assist the state with establishment of the park (N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, 1977).

The 1969 legislature approved the appropriation of \$120,000 to start land acquisition at Raven Rock State Park. Because the value of the land identified for state park acquisition far exceeded the \$120,000 appropriation, the state sought to leverage the \$120,000 by applying for a federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) matching grant. By pulling together additional funds from the Department of Conservation and Development, and by using the \$30,000 appraised value of a 170-acre tract donated by Burlington Industries, the state was able to raise the amount of state money to be matched by the federal LWCF grant (National Park Service, 37-00184). Approximately \$477,500 was left to be raised by private gifts and other sources to complete the total project as envisioned in the bill originally presented to the legislature (N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, 1977), but these funds never materialized and the third phase of the LWCF grant had to be withdrawn for lack of state funding.

From 1970-1975, the LWCF grant helped the state acquire lands critical for establishment of the park by providing \$389,082 in federal matching funds. In total, over 2,500 acres on both sides of the Cape Fear River were acquired for the new park under the LWCF grant. Properties acquired included the first parcel for the park, the 221.7-acre J.C. and Dorothy Cummings tract, acquired on March 19, 1970 (National Park Service, 37-00184). Per federal LWCF regulations, properties acquired in whole or part using LWCF assistance are not to be converted to other than public outdoor recreation use.

As North Carolina's development and land prices accelerated, the Division of State Parks urged protection of new park areas as well as expansion of some existing ones before the opportunity to do so would be forever lost. Appeals for additional state park land acquisition throughout the state were made, including the publication in 1972 of *North Carolina State Parks NOW or NEVER*. The booklet described 27 areas proposed as worthy additions to the state parks system, and, as a point of emphasis, described six areas – called “Never Areas” - previously investigated or proposed as state parks but that were no longer feasible to acquire. The report also listed ten existing parks with critical land acquisition needs, including 1,000 acres recommended for acquisition at Raven Rock State Park (State of North Carolina, 1972).

Although undeveloped, operation of the park began in 1970 with visitors hiking, fishing, picnicking, and sight seeing, and with some environmental education use. By 1975, a gravel parking lot, a temporary park office in a trailer, and 18 picnic sites were provided near the park entrance on the south side of the river. From here, several miles of trails led through the park to the river. A wooden stairway led from the top of Raven Rock to the riverside. A canoe take-out/ canoe camp and a group camp were located along the river, while several wilderness campsites had been developed. On the north side of the river, horse trails were cut.

A second Land and Water Conservation Fund grant awarded in 1984 provided \$103,982 in federal matching funds to assist with the acquisition of four additional parcels totaling 56.3 acres. These parcels provided land critical to the development of recreational and support facilities for the park and necessary for access to previously acquired park lands (National Park Service, 37-00802). Other land acquisition has taken place from time to time over the years, including approximately 700 acres acquired from Weyerhaeuser Corporation in late 2002.

Although the park has a nice trails system, development of adequate recreation and environmental education facilities at the park has never taken place. In 1986, a restroom was constructed at the picnic area, but no picnic shelters have ever been built to serve park visitors. The cramped park office is a 60-foot by 12-foot trailer purchased in 1993 after the first office, also a trailer, was destroyed when a tree was blown on top of it during a severe thunderstorm. No suitable indoor facilities have ever been built for environmental education programs and exhibits. The park's maintenance buildings, constructed in 1997 with funds from the 1993 state parks bond initiative, adequately serve the park's maintenance operations.

In September of 1996, Hurricane Fran landed in southeastern North Carolina and proceeded to move northwest through the center of North Carolina. Wind and water damage resulted in Governor Jim Hunt declaring a state of emergency in all 100 counties, the first time such action had ever been taken (Barnes, 2001). Damage to the park caused by the storm resulted in the park being closed for part of that year, and the north side of the park remained closed through half of 1997. Inmates from Southern Correctional Institute were brought in to help clear Raven Rock's trails and other areas of downed trees and storm debris.

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